

EMORY



Prof. Barbara Metcalf

Seminar Director

Ruby Lal  
Associate Professor  
MESAS Department

Seminar Committee

Vincent J. Cornell  
Chair and Professor  
MESAS Department

Joyce Flueckiger  
Professor  
Religion Department

Gordon Newby  
Professor  
MESAS Department

EMORY UNIVERSITY

MESAS Department  
Callaway Center S-312  
537 Kilgo Circle  
Atlanta, GA 30322  
404-727-2697  
www.mesas.emory.edu

# South Asia Seminar Series

*Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies ~ MESAS*

## Professor Barbara Metcalf

Professor of History Emerita  
University of California, Davis

Mellon Emeritus Fellow, Department of History  
University of Michigan

*Women's Development and Human Improvement:  
"A Muslim Princess Writes a Book in  
Nineteenth-Century India"*

Tuesday, April 3, 2012

4:00pm

Bowden Hall 323

Emory University

The story of Nawab Shah Jahan Begum of Bhopal fits no easy narrative. Was she a lackey or, as an occasional recent writer proclaims, an anti-colonial hero for defying British opposition to her husband and her behavior? Was she committed to women's interests, or just those of her class – or only her own? Was she forward looking or regressive? Witness, for example, her surprising decision, in contrast to her mother, to adopt seclusion, appearing, for example, at colonial ceremonies completely covered. Shah Jahan was exceptional in her princely status, but she participated in larger trends of the day, particularly in late nineteenth century movements shared across religious traditions. These new patterns are typically seen as at once empowering and constraining women. Tagged as "Islamization" in the case of Muslims, however, most observers have emphasized the limitations, rather than opportunities, for women. Shah Jahan's behavior and writings, especially her normative guide, tells a specific story about the implications of reformed Islamic practice. It also tells a profoundly universal story about a struggle to chart one's own life in the face of interference and disrespect.

*Co-sponsored by Workshop in Colonial and Post-Colonial Studies*